

Europe Backs Lithuania, But Declines Direct Aid

Joint Reply Urges End to Soviet Blockade

By Edward Cody

Washington Post Foreign Service

DUBLIN, April 21—West European nations called on the Soviet Union today to lift its economic blockade of Lithuania but stopped short of any steps to loosen the squeeze by pledging supplies to the breakaway Soviet republic.

Foreign ministers of the 12-nation European Community, gathered here in a special meeting, thus joined the United States in offering moral support while taking care to avoid a confrontation over the issue with President Mikhail Gorbachev.

"We understand the situation of Lithuania, but we also understand the very difficult situation of President Gorbachev," declared Foreign Minister Francisco Fernandez Ordonez of Spain. "We should be very prudent on this point."

"It's not only important for the European Community to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union, but from Lithuania's own point of view, it is important that Gorbachev not be undermined," added an official from Ireland, which holds the EC's current presidency.

The ministers urged Moscow to moderate its policy and replace pressure tactics with immediate negotiations on the Baltic republic's declaration of independence.

Despite the lack of tangible aid, the European stand represented a victory for Lithuania in its search for support abroad against Moscow. With his policy of improving relations with the West, Gorbachev could ill afford to reject the European point of view out of hand, officials here explained.

The Lithuanian prime minister, Kazimiera Prunskiene, appealed to Western Europe this morning in Copenhagen for moral and political support, recognition and pressure on the Soviet Union, Danish Foreign Minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen reported to his colleagues. In comments to reporters in the Danish capital, the Lithuanian leader said she had not sought commitments for European help in getting oil to Lithuania despite Moscow's announcement that it is cutting off all supplies.

The European reply agreed on here said:

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REUTERS

ers wait to buy gas yesterday in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, as cutoff of oil supplies by Soviet Union continued.

Europeans Back Lithuania, Decline Aid

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The community and its member states express their serious concern over the economic measures recently introduced by Moscow in relation to Lithuania. They believe that measures of a coercive nature can make no contribution to the search for a solution through dialogue."

What an Irish official described as a call for an end to the Soviet embargo on oil, gas and other vital supplies, the declaration added: "They are firmly of the view that any outcome acceptable to all must be reached by means of discussion. They are on all concerned not to carry out such measures which are inconsistent with this objective."

Although directed at both sides, the declaration was not intended as a suggestion that Lithuania suspend or retract the March 11 declaration of independence that set off the crisis between Lithuania and the central Soviet government in Moscow, the declaration specified. He said the question of diplomatic recognition did not arise because most of the community's 12 members had never recognized Soviet absorption of Lithuania half a century ago.

The standoff between Moscow and Vilnius overshadowed discussions of how East Germany will be absorbed into the European Community. This was the original purpose of the special foreign ministers' gathering here, one week before a European summit conference—also exceptional—called to discuss the same topic.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of West Germany thanked his colleagues warmly for embracing the schedule, prepared by the community's Brussels-based executive body, the European Commission, for East Germany to attain membership as it melts into West Germany in the months ahead and described this as a demonstration of broad European acceptance of German reunification.

Genscher and his French counterpart, Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, staged a display of amity at a joint news conference during which they sang the praises of Thursday's Franco-German proposal for European political union by 1993, including foreign and security affairs, in addition to the economic and monetary unions already under discussion.

"It is time to make a leap forward," Dumas declared, pointing at the rapid changes in Eastern Europe.

Dumas said his fellow foreign ministers gave the proposal a generally positive response, despite what he called "a few nuances" from Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd of Britain. In another room only a few feet away, however, Hurd was telling reporters at the same time that the European Community has many other tasks before it, including implementation of the single European market by 1993, that must be carried out successfully before any discussion on political union.

"In our view, there cannot be any question of Britain, under any gov-

ernment, agreeing to treaty amendments which commit us to a centralized government or a centralized parliament," he said. "We are clear that we are not alone in the community in holding that view."

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain rejected the idea of swift political union as "esoteric" soon after it was announced and resumed her criticism today.

In London, Thatcher proposed instead a loose federation that would protect the sovereignty of individual states, Reuter reported.

"I believe most people want to be proud of their country and want to feel that affinity to it as well as to Europe," she added.

For President Francois Mitterrand of France, however, announcement of the proposal represented a double gain even if disagreement prevents swift progress toward putting it into practice.

The joint initiative papered over differences that had separated Bonn and Paris in recent weeks as Chancellor Helmut Kohl barreled ahead with his plans for German unification. And raising the idea of a European security policy moved thinking in the direction favored by Mitterrand.

The Bush administration has sought to make the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into a more politically oriented alliance able to deal with the new East-West atmosphere, while Mitterrand has insisted that European institutions and the 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe are better suited for such tasks.